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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002786

SIPDIS

AF/W AND AF/RA
INR FOR ROANE
AF/W FOR PARKS, EPSTEIN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2006

TAGS: PINS PTER KISL PHUM KIRF NI

SUBJECT: RADICALIZATION OF ISLAM IN NIGERIA

REF: (A) SECSTATE 177569

Classified by Charge Timothy Andrews, for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Embassy interprets a "radical formulation of Islam" (reftel) as one which deems violence against Americans as licit for reasons of faith. Few in Nigeria have adopted this extreme view; however, there is widespread concern and significant anger among Muslims in Nigeria against the U.S. action in Afghanistan. Sympathy for UBL is visible, particularly among the young, male, Northern urban underclass. On the whole, Nigerian Muslims are not anti-American, or anti-Western, yet may suspect us of being anti-Islamic and view our military action as confirmation. If military operations are prolonged or marred by growing civilian casualties, this belief will harden. If this dynamic takes root, many Muslims, particularly young marginalized males and the more outspoken clerics, will become susceptible to a radicalized view of Islam that not only promotes violence, but also explicitly rejects Western ideals of a secular polity and market-oriented economy.
End Summary.

View From the Ground

¶2. (SBU) Most Nigerian Muslims condemn the 9/11 attacks but many also oppose coalition action in Afghanistan as an attack against fellow Muslims. The majority hold the U.S. responsible for having created the atmosphere that produces terrorists through policies they perceive as anti-Islamic in Iraq and the Middle East peace process. Many are skeptical about any evidentiary link between the September 11 attacks and Usama Bin Laden. Our failure to provide a public account of our evidence seems to them to confirm their suspicions. More moderate Islamic leaders, in addition to publicly condemning the attacks, and tacitly acknowledging the necessity of some type of military response, have voiced concerns about how these events might affect Islam as a whole. In a nutshell, our military action in Afghanistan is seen by many as the latest example of superpower heavy-handedness in the Islamic world.

The Media

¶3. (SBU) There is no newspaper or other media outlet in Nigeria that has a "radical Islamic editorial policy," meaning that it encourages Muslims to attack Americans. However in mostly Muslim northern Nigeria, numerous editorials criticized U.S. policy. There have also been columns supporting Bin Laden, which increased dramatically after air strikes commenced. Two newspapers--the Northern states' government owned New Nigerian in Kaduna and The Daily/Weekly Trust in Abuja--have prominently featured critical columns. The critical sentiment shades their news reports. The Daily/Weekly Trust is new, so it does not have an established track record against which to measure its anti-American print. The New Nigerian, however, opposed Desert Storm, so its spin on September 11 is consistent with its previous work. Though new, Trust is far more widely read than the New Nigerian. The Federal Government-owned Federal Radio Corporation Nigeria (FRCN) in Kaduna also airs highly critical opinions of U.S. policy.

Islamic Preaching/Teaching

¶4. (SBU) Many Northern states have adopted versions of expanded Shari'a law in the past two years. While this movement was based on local considerations, it was also, in part, a rejection of a dysfunctional secular legal system. Nevertheless, the Shari'a law movement has no direct link to growing distress at our bombing of Afghanistan. Strong rhetoric critical of U.S. military action has been used by a small but steadily increasing number of clerics, and some of these have also advocated for expanded Shari'a. Among the strongest statements was one from the Zamfara State Commissioner of Religious Affairs calling for Muslims to pray for the "annihilation" of the U.S. if it invades Afghanistan.

Yet, by and large, most clerics reflect as well as help shape mainstream Muslim views. They decry the terrorist attacks, but in the same breath oppose our reaction.

¶16. (SBU) If radicalism emerges in Nigeria, a focal point would be Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, a long-time center of Islamic activism. Zaria based Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky, leader of Nigeria's Muslim Brothers, relishes being known as a militant and would be a likely candidate to push Nigerian Muslims toward radicalism. However, both Zakzaky and his movement lost support because of his opposition to the adoption of "partial" Shari'a law under a secular government. The Ullama, particularly in Kano, could also emerge as a catalyst for radical Islam.

Political Parties

¶19. (SBU) There is no political party that advocates Islamic radicalism in Nigeria.

NGO's

¶10. (C) Prominent Islamic NGO's include the Red Crescent, International Islamic Relief Organization, International Federation of Islamic Students Organization and the Federation of Muslim Women of Nigeria. All have ties to Saudi Arabia but none appear tied to Islamic radicalism. Transnational organizations, such as the Islamic Call Society, also have offices in Nigeria. Cataloguing all Islamic NGOs operating in Nigeria and determining their political orientation exceeds our limited resources.

Financial Institutions

¶11. (SBU) The former BCCI operated in Nigeria, and its Nigerian assets are now controlled by the Lagos-based AIB Bank. Post has no information linking AIB, or any other bank, to radical Islamic activism.

Foreign Study

¶12. (SBU) Most Nigerian Muslims who study abroad go to the U.S., U.K., Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, Libya and Iran, in descending order of popularity. Those who wish to study in an Islamic country and who are seeking technical or medical degrees lean toward Saudi Arabia, while those pursuing Islamic studies gravitate to Egypt. Many professionals are reluctant to return here for economic reasons, but religious scholars tend to return after their course of study. After completion of their studies, they are likely to preach or take up positions as Ullama or teachers. We expect a more militant bent from many of those who studied in Libya, Sudan or Iran, but there is no evidence of a violent radicalism being brought back to Nigeria.

Foreign Itinerants

¶13. (C) Post does not have knowledge of individual foreign itinerants promoting a radical, i.e. violently anti-American, formulation of Islam in the North. There are a substantial number of itinerant Islamic scholars from the Sudan who reside in or visit Nigeria regularly. Algerian and Iranian religious scholars resident in Katsina and Kano have also been reported. Malam Yakubu Musa, a Muslim cleric residing in Katsina, was recently arrested and then acquitted of harboring Algerian radicals alleged to be affiliated with the FSPC. While we do not have specific knowledge, we would expect many of these Ullama to be among the most vocal and militant "street clerics" and likely candidates for fomenting radicalism.

¶14. (C) There have been no rumors of planned attacks by Muslims against USG installations or Amcits. That said, if a European or American were to wander into an anti-U.S. demonstration he or she could well be targeted. Muslim FSNs have expressed concern and mistrust for Ibrahim Zakzaky. They warn that while he stops short of preaching that violence against Americans is justified by Islam, some of his followers may be more radical.

¶15. (C) Comment: Nigeria is struggling with its own ethnic and religious conflicts, independent of recent world events. However, world events do exacerbate internal ethnic and religious tensions. On the whole, Nigerian Muslims are not anti-American, or anti-Western, but are unhappy over US military action in Afghanistan. The fact that our forces do not target civilians means nothing to Nigerian Muslims as long as our munitions are killing civilians. Some Nigerian Muslims view bombardment that results in collateral (Muslim) civilian deaths as not substantially different from terrorist attacks that deliberately target (American) civilians. The longer our military action is prosecuted in Afghanistan, and if significant civilian casualties continue to mount, this

anger will only increase. In time, it could give vent to a more radical expression of Islam in some parts of the country. End Comment.

Andrews